

You Got To Let Me Know by dropout-ninja

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Summary: Steve expected to confront his ex and the Byers kid about what he assumed what clear as day- by the end of that hour his entire life was upended. Now, to the confusion of the high school, 'King' Steve Harrington and Jonathan Byers are spending time together...because falling headfirst into monster fighting makes a person want answers

1. Chapter 1

Stranger Things and its characters do not belong to me. All rights go to their respective owners.

Warnings: Spoilers for season 1. Brief language.

I had hoped after season 1 that there would be more interactions between Jonathan and Steve because Jon really, really, needs more friends than just Nancy but the way both the next seasons went there really was no chance for the two of them to do much together.

The unlikely trio stood in a mixture of awe and relief on the Byers' front porch. The light up above had stopped flickering and left the place looking almost normal for the first time since the monster had answered the call for blood. Nancy still had her mouth open but the tenseness had gone out of her shoulders. No doubt her hand was beginning to register the pain. Jonathan knew his had.

"I think I've got monster blood on me."

Steve's comment broke the silence. He was still standing with the others, the bat over his shoulder.

"You could use the shower," Jonathan answered absentmindedly. Seeing his mom through the lights as she had seen Will had him too distracted to notice the surrealness of the situation. He, Jonathan Byers, had just offered King Steve Harrington of Hawkins High his shower. Because the popular boy had a monsters residue on him.

Steve made no immediate move inside.

"We should get back," Nancy turned to Jonathan. The older teen took a moment to bring himself back to the moment and change his stare from the light to the girl.

"...but we can't split up. All of us are bloody and the house is bloody and if only some of us leave then the monster could come back."

Nancy cast a glance back at her once-boyfriend who was currently

staring down at the ground with pursed lips in an attempt to look like he wasn't conspicuously hearing everything they said. His face was still red and puffy from where Jonathan had hit it; back hours ago when the world had to have looked much clearer for the other.

"Maybe-" Jonathan began a bit louder. "Maybe we should all clean up a bit. Hopefully it's too injured to come back but I don't want to take any chances." The cut on his palm pulsed again. Nancy bit her lower lip. Steve swung the bat down from his shoulders to his feet as if he was always used to wielding one with nails driven into it. Skin, blood, wet slime, hung from the bent nails and dripped onto the porch. Who knew how much came from when Steve had driven the monster off of Jonathan and saved him from being mauled.

Only minutes before there had been chaotic noises and lights. Then, with one last scream from the monster, the house had become quiet again. And in that quiet came the strange, instinctual feeling that the movements of the light, so peaceful and familiar even as they were alien, was actually his mother and Hopper.

He glanced up at the still outdoor light again.

Steve thought he had been used to an empty house. Out of necessity, he had been forced to grow out of the nightmares of nighttime and quiet homes at a young age; when he was left alone as often as he was, he couldn't wet his bed out of terror for whatever monsters would come through his door. So for the years after that, a house without mom and dad meant a house for his own fun and quiet time. The first day after it all, Steve took a sick day. It was then regretted. The house was just too empty. Too many questions remained. Too many jump scares. The little bumps on the ceiling caused from water damage and other aging issues slid downward into a monster that landed on top of Jonathan Byers. He never would have noticed the ridges on the ceiling before but now his imagination took them and blew them out of proportion.

Because of the confused daydreams that messed with his day, Steve went back to school again.

And couldn't figure out what to do with himself. Steve was supposed

to be suave and in control of this setting. But he wasn't feeling it. He couldn't set his tray by Tommy and Carol. For one, he really just didn't want to. Even if they weren't royally pissed at him, Steve wouldn't feel completely at ease listening to their questions.

Nancy was sitting alone. A few weeks ago Barb would've been sitting with her. At the start of last week she would probably be sitting at the table with Tommy and Carol and himself. Now her table was empty and she picked at her food halfheartedly while half the school looked at her with grins and leers as they assumed she was the newest 'slut' to gossip about. How wrong they were. Geez, how wrong he had been. Sure, from his standpoint it had looked pretty clear. All up until the point that Nancy had pointed a gun at him and a flesh-and-blood monster had crawled into the room. But nobody else knew about that. They could only sneer and whisper with what knowledge they thought they could see visibly. Steve meandered over slow and unsure. He took a seat at the table next to Nancy. They exchanged quick hello's. Steve started to eat. Nancy looked at her flashcards without enthusiasm.

Steve had been hyper alert since the monster fight. Senses still maddeningly perked up, he saw each movement Jonathan Byers made as he tried to hunch his way over without attention. The gossip queens of Hawkins began their hissing whispers and the King of Hawkins High found he didn't really care what they were saying. Not yet at least. Not while he was still as wildly alert and unbelieving as he was.

Jonathan sat at Nancy's table halfway between her and Steve. All three picked at their food. Steve ate more heartily than any of the others but even he was slower than usual as the urge to talk was stronger than the need to feed.

"So," he began and drew the word out, "Can we talk sometime? After school?"

Both of the other teens jumped almost noticeably as he broke the still but they offered nervous little smiles and nods. He couldn't blame them. He was still jumping at everything, half expecting a mouth of teeth to be only inches away.

The trio met after school had ended near the upper parking lot. Tommy's eyes met Steve's and the darker haired boy sneered his way and gave him a leering expression to match his rude gesture thrown up his way; then the former friend was throwing his arm over Carol and laughing at his expense as the two left him with the newest weirdos of the high school.

"First things first." Steve opened the trunk of his car and tossed cotton clothes (that hadn't really fit all that well but worked the night of after his old ones were contaminated at the Byers house) at Jonathan, who barely caught them. "Just giving those back man. Now," he shut the trunk and swung himself onto it so that he could stare at the other two as he sat, "Can anyone explain what the hell happened the other day?"

The story came together messily. Bits and pieces came from completely different sources, like their kid siblings who were *somehow* involved, and Nancy and Jonathan weren't great at explaining them. By the end everything at least made a little more sense.

The monster that he had seen first hand came from the government lab nearby. It had taken Barb at his party. It had taken Will Byers. Mrs. Byers and the chief of police had saved Will. Barb was dead.

Someone had died in his backyard and still Tommy and Carol and Nicole and the rest were laughing and too busy graffiting slander of his ex than caring about the missing kids of Hawkins. That was it. Steve needed new friends.

And here were two possibilities. If anything, finding out the truth about Nancy had only made him love her more. She had never been cheating on him; she had been looking for a kid and for her best friend while dodging the grasp of a near invincible monster. She was a hero. And Jonathan? It would take a bit of time for Steve to truly forgive him for being a creep and taking those pictures of Nancy. But after fighting that creature in his house, Steve had a feeling he would be seeing the resident weirdo in a different light. They both were heroes. The bandages on their hands were a reminder of that sacrificial bravery they shared. If anything ever threatened Hawkins again, Steve swore he'd be one of its heroes as well instead of

drinking away a teen's worries in true party style.

"Hey," Steve said and drew Jonathan's attention again, "Hey man."

The other teen turned his way and his eyes made it to about Steve's shoulder instead of feet.

"I'm glad your brother's alright."

Jonathan's mouth quirked up and back down in that awkward manner of his. Anyone else and Steve would probably slap a shoulder on his back and grin his way away. But the Byers were all strange people and Jonathan was the strangest of them. "...thanks. Me too."

He flashed another almost smile nervously and then stood for a second longer in silence than what was socially normal before moving away.

"Hey Jon?" Steve called out again. "Can I keep the bat?"

AN- This has two more chapters and a brief epilogue plotted out. Hopefully it will be finished soon

Feel free to point out any spelling/grammar error so I can fix it :)

Thank you for your time! Please leave a review :D

2. Should I Stay

There was a layer of snow on the ground outside. The cold seeped into the house no matter if the doors were shut and heater was on. Even though the hole had been boarded up on the wall, the Byers house was still far from the cozy winter home that the Wheeler's or Harrington's likely had. Jonathan hadn't ever really thought hard on that before; there had never been a reason to compare and contrast. Now he was finding himself wondering just a bit if the two guests coming over would be comfortable or if they'd freeze.

It was a strange day. Jonathan could count on one hand how many times he'd had someone over. If his mom was home from work she likely would smother the two guests and be thrilled that her oldest was finally branching out into the social world of other humans. Busy and stressed as she was, she still managed to make him feel the touches of anxiety bringing people over was causing by being so overly happy about it (and talking about it the entire time they had ran into each other in the kitchen).

It was mid February and all three teens were still feeling the aftereffects of the strange occurrences the previous years end held. They still stumbled across each other in school. Nancy remained near him, making him step out of his comfort zone with every activity she pulled him into while smiling that little undeniable smile that he still hadn't learned how to deny. The weird part was being around her at the same time Steve was pulling some form of PDA or other with his girlfriend. It spoke greatly of the strengths of team building that monster fighting gave that the three even remained spending time together. Whenever Steve would scoop Nancy up, Jonathan would just feel the pit of disappointment inside and zone out; eventually he settled for leaving when the two began to overtly show off their "coupledom". Surprisingly enough, Jonathan noticed a similar spark of jealousy when Steve would be scooped up by some other high schooler, even if such an event likely left him alone with Nancy. Not identical feelings- no lost opportunities banged around inside him at the sight- but still enough to make him see the scene, and the departing back of the other teen, with disappointment.

The three had visited at school, at the park, at lunches, at Nancy's place (although that one was often very uncomfortable for Jonathan) before picking up Will if Steve happened to be over. They reminisced about their adventure. They panicked about their adventure. Sometimes they talked school talk, an abnormally strange conversation topic in light of just what activity had brought them together. Gradually they would meet because of it; some test, some paper, what not. This was how Jonathan Byers discovered that while Steve Harrington was in no way dumb, he was not the most academic writer. The papers were artistic, yes, but not quite formatted in the way accepted as a successful format. Jonathan didn't live inside of the many barriers and rules made on what was accepted or not in the world; even if he wouldn't be giving Steve's work a high A, he could appreciate that the stuff didn't feel like every other A students papers. Today, after three months of this unsteady trio, they would be meeting at his house to look over some of the shared math work he and Steve had while they grilled Nancy in her near-perfect memory of her own classes note cards.

Will was at the Wheeler's house playing with his friends (while under very careful observation and not in any way allowed to leave until his ride was there) so the Byers' house was silent. The snow fell while Jonathan wore his headphones and bobbed to the music. Alone in the house he could just listen to it on his speakers; no one would get disrupted and the sound wouldn't hurt his ears as much when he did finally stop the music. But every once in a while he would jump at any slight mess up of the tapes and picture the scene his mom had told him about; the player starting up on its own or shutting off in preclusion to some twisted creature's entrance into their world. In the quiet emptiness of the house, today was one of those days. Having the other two that had fought that thing with him coming over today only seemed to make the idea of all that madness come to his imagination easier. So instead of delving into that state of extra jumpiness, Jonathan listened through headphones from where he sat on the couch and watched the door.

When the knock came, he jumped and pulled the device off, dropping it onto the couch as he made for the door. The journey from couch to door was just slightly faster than normal; opening it to the sight of two people that were not his mom and brother had his heart leap just

slightly faster than normal instead of sink as it should have empirically done.

Jonathan hadn't had 'friends' in many, many years. The feelings were unnatural for him, nerve wracking in their uniqueness and strange in their lack of distaste for another person. *So close to fight or flight*- Jonathan only opened the door wider and let even more cold air into the small house.

It was weird to think of his backyard and the forests he drove through to get to town as a monster's hunting grounds. No matter how real that night had been, in broad daylight Steve just almost couldn't picture the lanky humanoid figure prowling around. *Almost*.

The monster still haunted him. Steve kept the nail-bat under his bed and gave his mom some excuse about burglars for its presence when she noticed the handle (thankfully not sporting any nails) in the shade of it. Part of him worried that she'd pull it out and then gasp and demand answers and give him hell, the imagined panic ending in him being grounded; unsurprisingly she just gave it another glance and left it be without any questions asked or smothering worry expressed. As fall became winter there was no sign of any other creatures but Steve and the bat would be ready the minute one flower head of teeth peeked up into Hawkins.

If the fear, and that unmistakable trickle of excitement he couldn't banish at the idea of standing in front of others and keeping the monsters off bay, was worse in the shadows at night, it was still occasionally present in the sun. Steve was ashamed to admit it, but he hadn't walked out in the woods further than the distance it took to see his house since it all had happened. Tommy and Carol would mock him for it if he still hung out with them. His girlfriend wouldn't. Jonathan Byers' wouldn't. But he still didn't casually share that fact out of the embarrassment inside him at being scared of a stroll in the woods.

But while fighting that monster alone would have been terrifying, being in the thick of the fight with others that he had to protect as best he could wasn't on the same level of fear as being cornered alone would have been. Sharing the fear with others really did help.

The creature's hunting grounds stretched in the forest areas near the lab; areas like his house and the Byers' house. Little Will Byers probably felt the same way he did about going outside, let alone looking out during the night. To be fair, Will probably had it a lot worse than him. Poor kid. Once again, Steve was struck with how much of a douche Tommy and Carol both were when they had mocked the kid. It was bad enough while they had all thought he was dead. In reality, they were laughing and spouting lewd jokes at his expense while he struggled to survive in some twisted other dimension(?) Steve wasn't clear on that still because he hadn't gotten to see it so he had only the descriptions offered to go off of with that monster drooling at his heels.

At any rate, Steve couldn't just let himself be handicapped like he currently was. Thus, his Glorious Plan was born.

Even if he tried not to outright let on how messed up he was, Steve was alright dropping casual remarks about his newfound fear of the woods to the two other teenagers who would understand. Both were sympathetic.

"If I went out again, in your backyard behind the pool area, I think I would jump whenever a branch cracked. That...gray skin and height and face would flash by like it did before."

Nancy looked down before looking into his eyes with worry (it was a cute look on her. But Steve was too grateful with her empathy to note that attraction much) and spoke up again, "Oh. Oh Steve, that probably didn't help. I'm sorry-"

He rushed to reassure her. Even if yes, now he would be picturing a naked giant of a man-thing with long arms and no face running circles around him when he'd go and get a smoke outside the patio.

"Will talks about it all to me, or used to," Jonathan muttered as well, "Sometimes I get jumpy looking over the yard when the others are sleeping because he told me how it just *walked* towards him. And I get nervous...taking pictures," he said in an even quieter voice, likely out of the mutual disgust both had over *that incident*, "out there when I think about how it just flashed in and out so fast to get people quick enough to miss seeing it."

Barb.

Nancy was obviously thrown into her own mourning at the reference while Steve once again thought of how that had happened *in his own backyard while he and his friends had been laughing and partying and being stupid teenagers*. The backyard he was now scared of a good fifty percent of the time he was out there in the quiet.

"It's the phone and the lights that get to me more, whenever they act up," Jonathan offered, mouth ticking into a flash of a dry grin. "That. That probably isn't helping either."

It wasn't as likely to disturb him as it was Jonathan or Nancy since they had more time and experience witnessing those strange occurrences. For all he knew, Jonathan had tossed out any sort of night light he had. Or he was doing as Steve did and picking up the habit of sleeping with one so that he could be on the alert if something decided he looked tasty while snoozing away. The memory of a house of flashing lights seen from a car would not soon be forgotten.

"You know what might?" he himself spoke up with a grin of his own. Classy style. Hiding the fear *and* showing his excitement at his idea both in one fell swoop. "A hike. Me, you and you. Just a casual, fun day in the outdoors strolling through the trees. And if we happen to pack a few weapons with us, well..." Steve just offered a shrug.

With the bat over his shoulder, carefully so not to poke any nails into him, and the company of his fellow 'monster fighters', the hike really wasn't all that bad. If anything, it was much more fun than the three teens that may-or-may-not jump at twigs had imagined it would be.

To Steve's happiness, it wasn't the last hike the trio took; although the later ones were more spontaneous for fun activities than the therapeutic purposes of the originals.

Also to his happiness was the calm he could feel by summertime when he stepped into the forest for a smoke.

Three quarters of a year before, the Harrington house had been used

for a meeting of teens. It had been a freezing cold night but the heated pool still found company. Now it was summer in Indiana. It was hot and the clear waters of the pool sparkled invitingly. Not many households in Hawkins could afford such a fancy utility. The cold, refreshing blue should have tempted the teens currently inside the house out into its water. Should have, but failed to as the day turned into night and the sun finally began to darken.

Even if the pool, which held far, **far**, too many memories for any of them to go to, was sitting outside neglected, the Harrington house was still an ideal summer getaway. Steve's parents were gone again. Almost a year before, this would've been the opportunity to break out the alcohol and get a new notch in his belt. Now, while there was alcohol being drunk in little red cups, he had just used the opportunity to get together with some friends. Friends that had, through unreal horror and embarrassing aftermaths, a different sort of chemistry with him than any in school did.

Nancy laughed at the jokes being told. Her cup was low but she had no plans to refill it when she did finally make it to the bottom at her currently slow pace; the last time she had drank here had been the night her best friend had died. The night she had tried to sneak upstairs only for her 'guardian' to try to do her job and instead be told to go. To just go. And she had never come back. The photo had shown her sitting on the diving board with the monster behind her. Lonely. In deadly danger. No matter how inviting cold water might be, Nancy couldn't enter that pool without thinking of a distorted version in another world that held Barb's corpse.

Jonathan gave a chuckle at the different wisecracks or stories told by the others. The film they had popped in was, surprising to the other two, mainly critiqued by the quiet boy. His cup had barely been touched. It was weird enough that he had been invited into this house, the very house he had acted the pervert outside of; he didn't need to get drunk and say or do something dumb that would rescind that kindness. Still, even with the awkwardness of the reminder in his mind (and no doubt in the other two's even if they did stay quiet about it and let it lay in the past), Jonathan let himself just watch films and listen to conversations and enjoy himself. A year ago he never would have believed this was happening, let alone the most

surprising part to him: he was happy.

Steve told most of the wisecracks. They were mostly impromptu and got reactions he thrived on; Nancy hitting him with a pillow while still laughing over whatever he said, Jonathan sniggering into his cup. Lightening up was something Steve needed within the stress of schoolwork, college applications, and parents that weren't there often to help him figure out where he was taking his life. Sometimes, the thought of hitting monsters with a baseball bat seemed so much simpler; the thoughts were out of taste when the consequences of that fight lay outside sliding glass doors. Unfortunately pools seemed rather ruined for him still and he hadn't had much time to enjoy the one outside since Nancy and Jonathan had explained the story (including the vital parts that occurred in his yard) months ago. But none of them needed to go out and swim to enjoy a nice summer evening. They enjoyed it well enough just poking fun at his parents movies playing on the projector in the living room.

All three sat on the couch facing the movie and watching it play out before them. The current scene became especially cringy. Jonathan made some comment on it and got the other two to crack up. Laughing, Steve leaned further into Nancy and after only a split second she did too. Both chuckled as they cuddled together. Next to them, Jonathan made an almost imperceptible noise and looked away. A few minutes and another joke later, Steve's fist bopped the other boys shoulder in weak protest. For the moment both were brought away from the presence, and tension it brought, of Nancy and just smirked at each other.

In the winter, Jonathan felt like his house was cold and shabby. In the summer, he felt like it was lacking in comparison to Steve's. Another teen may have felt embarrassed and allowed anxiety to enter their mind at the idea of a friend coming over to see it; neither Byers' boys were completely normal and Jonathan wasn't swallowed in any nervousness over the shabbiness of his house. Just the typical nervousness that came with anticipating a friend's visit; it still felt uncomfortably alien in nature to have some one over just to hang out.

A knock came on the door and he heard his mom opening it.

Jonathan arrived to see her bidding Steve in, smiling, offering snacks and such. It took a few minutes for them to escape and crash in his room.

"Your mom is so nice," Steve said as he fell to the bed. Its owner turned his room's chair around to face his guest. Even if he wasn't entirely sure of the socially normal way to respond to such a statement, Jonathan couldn't deny that Steve's approval of his family made him happy in his choice to continue spending time together.

He counted it lucky Steve hadn't dropped by when Bob was over. That had been awkward enough when it had been Nancy that had came by and he didn't desire to repeat exposing his tentative friends to his mom's new boyfriend.

Two hours later and the other teen had to get ready to leave. He was moving to do the task at a glacially sluggish speed. Had the situation been switched, Jonathan probably would have left at the time set by his mom or work or school in order to get to whatever he had to do next. Steve had no such ambition to get back to an empty house of homework. Even so, the conversation felt the pressure to wrap up.

Steve flopped on the bed until his head hung off upside down to stare at the seated Jonathan.

"We should go outside. Do something some time."

The other teen looked up at the suggestion.

"What'd you mean?" he asked.

"Just a guy's day," Steve proposed, "You and me."

Jonathan hummed. "Okay." The clipped answer must have shown how inexperienced he was in the offered idea.

"You haven't ever had a guys day..." Steve asked slow enough it sounded more like an unbelieving question.

"No, I have," Jonathan protested weakly, "Lonnie and I had guy's days. He took me on one for my tenth birthday. Made me kill a rabbit."

"So no hunting," the other boy noted. He nodded; not for small fuzzy animals at least. As it turned out, he had found hunting more deserving prey to be far less guilt inducing.

"Hmm," Steve thought out loud, a hand on his chin. His eyes flashed to the clock again. "We'll have to figure something out. It'll be like this except outside your house."

Jonathan had nothing against Nancy...quite the opposite problem was in play actually. He loved spending time with her, but time with Steve was far rarer. Taking Steve up on his offer, maybe a few times over the free time (which was split with the days Jonathan had to work or take Will places) they had left in summer, would be *fun*.

"Sure," he gave a small smile. His eyes could meet Steve's for a few seconds before flickering elsewhere. It was more progress than he'd made with most people.

Their first adventure outwards was one of embarrassing moments for both that they both laughed away.

By the fifth, Jonathan felt comfortable enough to bring his camera and catch a few shots of Steve doing incredibly stupid, endearing things and the other teen didn't bring up the bad blood between his hobby and current activity throughout it all.

AN- If I found out there had been a monster in my backyard eating people I wouldn't react well at all

3. Should I Go

Additional warnings for insensitive language, teen partying, and someone cheating on her boyfriend

"Yeah, he's a freak. That whole family is full of freaks."

"He's probably a queer. You can just tell by looking at him."

"Guy's a pervert. That was the old news tossed around last year. He snuck up behind someone's house and took pictures without permission. Got one of a couple about to do it."

"Oh yeah I heard that one. And his little brother's the one I hear about all the time from my sis? Zombie boy?"

"The town had a funeral for his body and then, suddenly, he's back! Running around with his little friends and being babysat by his creepy family at all times."

"He's a little fag."

"Just like his brother."

One more year. One more year and then this was all over. Insults would never end but this stupid high school environment would. But until then...

"Hey."

He put a hand out onto James' shoulder and gave it a squeeze.

"Keep that down," he said, "That's not cool."

Tommy broke into laughter as he made a mocking crying sound.

"That's not cool? You're not cool. Why don't you run back to your boyfriend?"

He ignored the taunt.

"Come on. That had the family scared to death. How about some respect."

It was not a question; it was a command. In days gone by, it would've been followed and spread because of the widespread respect held for himself. One final shake for James and then an affable back slap and a smile that didn't erase the glare. The bell sounded as he walked away, but the noise didn't block the comments.

"He used to be so cool."

"Oh yeah. King Steve. I miss those days."

"Don't we all? Now he's a pansy just like his friends."

The party was bullshit. Nancy's new favorite word. It had been fun for a while, but now Steve couldn't even focus on the noise and crowds through the pain in his chest.

He loved her. Damn it he loved her. He had never loved a girl before.

But she didn't feel the same.

The other party-goers were yelling, cheering, dancing, drinking. Having sex in upper rooms. Vomiting down below. It was chaos that, only a half hour ago, had been beautifully fun. Faces passed by blurred. People may or may not have called for him but he couldn't focus on their words or whatever dumb thing they wanted him to do.

One face stood out. Even in the state of heartbreak and alcohol, Steve could make out his face. Looking confused and out of place; and how true both those expressions were to the person beneath them.

He trusted Jonathan. Trusted him very, very much. So when he told him to take her home, knowing, just knowing somehow, that she would wake to his face and not call it bullshit, he trusted Jon would do it. There was a burning jealousy inside as he watched him load her into the car. But even when those crinkled eyes met his sunglasses, Steve made no move. For now, this was the best he could do with the scenario she had handed him.

And, at the very least, he knew Jonathan. Knew he was, underneath the angry, anti-social and awkward veneer, a good guy. Damn all this. Steve tossed his cup down hard and made for his car. The party was bullshit anyways.

Jonathan wanted to ask what had happened to him. His face was mottled and bloody. It looked worse than it had a year before after he had attacked Steve with every intent to fight brutal. He wanted to ask.

But he couldn't even look over at the other. In his gut was a twisting sickness and it roiled when he glanced Steve's way. Ill tasting guilt wouldn't let him speak a word to the friend he had cheated when he had slept with Nancy.

Jonathan wanted so badly to know if Steve was alright. But he couldn't bring himself to face him.

They didn't see each other much after that.

The status quo had been shaken and left him with new positives and negatives. On the one hand, Nancy now would sneak through his window like Steve had in the past and they would wake up to each others loving, groggy faces. On the other, he really missed his friend. Jonathan had found out how Steve had gotten the injuries through Mike Wheeler when he had asked his girlfriends brother soon after; it wasn't the same as hearing it first hand. For days he wanted to ask about it. To offer ice or some sort of gift that would make the pain and face better. But he didn't.

On occasion they all sat at the same table and shared conversation over lunch. It felt very faked, stilted. Even he, as out of touch with social interactions as he was, could tell that. It hurt. For days and weeks it hurt.

Jonathan liked to take pictures. In his mind, a candid shot helped look at *people* instead of their put-on *masks*. It was a hobby still and was likely going to be more than that; with only a few months left of school, Jonathan was looking into a small business that Nancy was

hoping to work for that could use a photographer. If they got that job then he would be focusing more on taking pictures for his career. But the new packs of footage wouldn't stop him from holding on to his old photos.

Among the photographs laying around his room or stacked in boxes were the few that weren't of his family or Nancy. Some shots left over from the middle school dance, some shots of nature, some shots of friends. The few he had.

A picture of Steve. And another. The other boy failing to fish and laughing. The two of them together caught when Will had snuck his camera out of his room.

For a few minutes Jonathan just sat and let his hair fall over his eyes as he looked down at the memories. Photos could show something more real than the world always gave. These showed Steve- Steve, the popular, energetic, jock from high school; someone he never thought he would ever tolerate let alone genuinely like, laughing that bright, fun laugh of his. These showed him- Jonathan, the abnormality, the anti-social friendless cynic, enjoying the time he was spending with the other young adult. That was the photos reality.

The reality was that Jonathan really did like Steve. The reality was that he really missed him.

That was it. Jonathan may have really screwed him over but he wasn't going to let that guilt keep him away from the other.

AN- All that's left is a short epilogue

4. Epilogue

Just wanted to get the short epilogue posted before college gets busy

Thanks for coming along on the ride!

Robin recognized him as one of the people present during that crazy fight at the Starcourt Mall; the one who had driven the car that she and Steve were tossed around the back in. After that fight they hadn't all stuck around for long because too many members of the group were torn apart by some loss or other. She hadn't seen much of Jonathan Byers because he had quickly rushed away with his family and girlfriend so Robin and Steve had gone off a different direction. As far as she knew, the Byers' had all moved out from Hawkins a few weeks before. Which made the other adults' sulking presence strange in this store in Hawkins.

"Hey!" Robin called to him cheerily from her spot leaning over the counter. "What can I do for you? Need a hand finding something?"

Jonathan made a sound that was suspiciously umm-like before answering, "I'm looking for Steve. Is he here?"

That was...not what she was expecting.

"Oh," she said intelligently, "Well he's here. But he's in the back right now."

"Alright," Jonathan replied and went silent. He just stood to the side of a shelf waiting. The silence and stillness became awkward.

"Do you need a movie? I've got better opinions than Steve when it comes to suggesting them," Robin spoke up again after a few minutes.

To her surprise, the silent boy laughed. It was short but the brief humor existed.

"Th-that doesn't surprise me."

A few moments later and he surprisingly elaborated.

"He has questionable taste in music and books. An educated guess based on that precedent says his taste in films is also questionable."

This time Robin laughed.

"Do you want my help then?" she offered once more. The question didn't even draw his gaze over from where he was staring at nothing.

"No thank you. I'm just here to see Steve," he finally answered.

Well then. Stall time, she supposed.

"Alright. You'll have to wait a bit," Robin said, "He's in the back organizing."

"Alright."

The quiet descended again. Robin found herself playing with one of her chain necklaces. The cold under her fingers kept her attention for a very short amount of time; the action wasn't quite stimulating enough to distract from conversation.

"You were at the mall."

"Yeah," Jonathan gave out an awkward laugh, "Yeah, I was. You too."

"That was," she shook her head. Tried to put him at ease. "That was crazy." That was an understatement. It had been the craziest week of her life. If anyone else had been in the store right now she wouldn't even bring it up. But crazy week it may have been, she wouldn't stay away from it all if she had the option to go back; a little thanks to Russian interrogators and wild adventures shared together had led her to sharing with Steve something she never would have in her sober mind- and Steve accepting it all in stride. Robin would never change the events that had led her to her new best friend.

"Yeah," he agreed. "That's Hawkins. You're going to have to get used to crazy if you're going to stay here."

Another brief pause.

"Is it less crazy out there in the big city?" Robin asked. The other

adult shook his head.

"We got a place in another small town. But yes, it is less crazy. Slightly less. It's good. We could use a break."

"A break from all the monsters?" she grinned. His expression didn't change again.

"Yeah."

Her hand had moved to tugging the necklace.

"Soo. Do you and Steve regularly fight monsters?"

It wasn't a question she had no answer for. Her new friend had told her everything he knew about the monster presence in Hawkins. Which granted...wasn't all that much in the way of answers. But somehow monsters prowling in the dark woods seemed easier to believe than Russians living in a massive sterile lab beneath their feet.

Jonathan just gave a bit of an offhand nod but glanced her way to offer a brief smile.

"I didn't see you around much in school." Never actually. Maybe a passing glance but she had never stopped to talk. "Was it because you were busy hunting monsters down out there?"

"Not always. I just- I didn't do a lot of socializing at school."

"Oh yeah?" she grinned sympathetically, "Me neither." Not when she wasn't in, and most importantly did not care to be in, any of the popular cliques. Not when she had crushes on her female friends and found herself distancing from them out of worry they would notice her blushes or behavior. High school hadn't mattered to her. As an adult with a life so removed from it, it still didn't matter to her. Maybe Jonathan Byers had viewed the environment similarly? Steve said he had started to after the incident with the 'demodogs' as he called them (and she maybe laughed at because really he spoke names made out of a hybrid Dungeons and Dragons word and dogs, invented by *Dustin*, with a completely straight face).

There was another little silence but it wasn't as awkward. Something about being in on a little secret that no one else knew of made her feel more comfortable around people.

"Makes sense. Both the monster hunting and the not socializing. I never really saw you around," Robin said.

"I—that's because I don't like most people," Jonathan admitted, casting his eyes aside towards the back doorway, "But some are the minority I do."

They must be pretty important, those small amounts outside the majority; they must be if Jonathan was willing to drive back into Hawkins just to visit them at their work.

AN-Old friend, meet new friend

Steve has a good team backing him up (Dustin included)

Please point out any spelling/grammar error so I can fix it :)

I hope you enjoyed! Please leave a review :D